



**TENTH  
CONGRESSIONAL  
DISTRICT**

Members of the  
Highland Park High  
School Band joined  
Congressman Kirk  
at the Capitol  
this spring.



# CONGRESSMAN MARK KIRK'S

## *Retirement Security, Veterans and Health Care Update*

May 2004

### **Priorities: Retirement Security, Veterans and Health Care**

Dear Friends,

**M**y top priorities in Congress include protecting retirement nest eggs, upgrading veteran's health care and modernizing Medicare.

With regard to our retirement savings, things are looking up. Over the last year, the Dow Jones Industrials are up 27%, the S&P 500 is up 31% and the NASDAQ is up 44%. The government reported that the United States created 308,000 new jobs last month and 978,000 since August of last year. To protect the markets, we must continue to crack down on corporate criminals. To date, the Justice Department indicted over 600 corporate defendants and won more than 250 convictions or guilty pleas.

We owe everything to the men and women of the Greatest Generation. The best way to honor them is to care for our veterans. Recently, the Veterans Administration and Navy announced plans to build a new combined healthcare facility in North Chicago. With a growing veteran community, the new Navy-VA facility will ensure veterans health care in northern Illinois for the future.

Congress took a major step under Medicare by offering to help seniors with the high cost of medicine. This month, seniors will be offered discount cards in preparation for the full drug benefit to be offered in 2006. Under the law, seniors will have the choice of keeping their current Medicare coverage or upgrading to the new program.

Please let me know if I can help you with any concerns with our federal government. It is an honor to represent you in Congress.

Sincerely,



### **Return to a Balanced Budget**

Following the 2000-2002 recession and the impact of September 11, 2001, the federal budget is in the red. **To meet our key obligations of national defense and retirement security, we must balance the budget as quickly as possible.**

While writing our budget, we should follow the key principles of promoting economic recovery, protecting Americans in uniform and ensuring the strength of Social Security and Medicare. Congressman Kirk voted for the budget plan that froze domestic spending at last year's level while not raising taxes. The budget also ensures that Americans who wear the uniform have what they need to accomplish their demanding missions overseas. In sum, the

plan adopted by the House cuts the deficit in half over the term of the budget.

Beyond cutting spending, Congressman Kirk led a large group of "Budget Hawks" to ensure that the spending restraints of the budget were strictly enforced. These reforms include automatic spending reductions if budget limits were reached, enhanced powers to kill pork-barrel projects and protections for Social Security and Medicare.

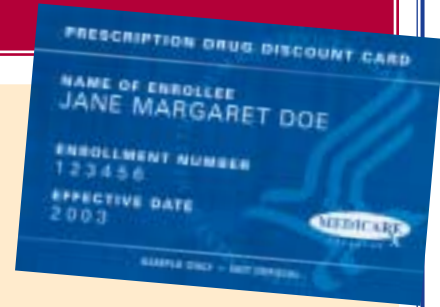
These reforms will come to the House floor next month. They are critical parts of a plan to meet the current financial obligations of the federal government before starting new spending programs that would delay a balanced budget.

## HEALTH CARE



Congressman Kirk discusses with seniors the benefits of the prescription drug program under Medicare.

- Drug cards are available now
- These discount cards are voluntary, enrolling is your choice
- Cards cost no more than \$30 a year
- These cards will provide discounts of 10% to 25% on brand name prescriptions, up to 40% on generic and mail-order drugs
- Low income seniors will receive a \$600 cash subsidy to help pay for their prescriptions



**Start saving on your prescription drugs June 1st**

**Call 1-800-548-9034  
or log on to [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)  
for more information**

### Making Prescription Drugs More Affordable for Seniors

Congress recently passed an historic Medicare modernization law that gives seniors the option to have a Medicare prescription drug benefit as part of their coverage. **Many seniors like Medicare the way it is and they will be free to keep their original Medicare coverage.** For many seniors who have health care provided by their former employer, the new law provides strong incentives for companies to continue that coverage.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) endorsed the bill. Congressman Kirk supported its passage because it creates a modern Medicare system, providing seniors with prescription drug benefits and more healthcare choices.

Under the law, the new prescription drug program will be offered to seniors in 2006. In order to provide help in 2004 and

2005, several providers will offer seniors Medicare-approved discount cards that will lower the cost of medicine by an average of 20%. Beginning in 2006, seniors will then have the option of upgrading their coverage with a prescription drug benefit for a \$35 a month premium.

The new drug benefit will not cover all costs. The basic part of the benefit will pay 95% of drug costs for patients who face drug costs over \$5,100 in a year. This is good news for patients fighting advanced heart disease, diabetes and cancer. These patients face annual drug costs that can exceed \$30,000 in just one year. The new law offers a basic protection that middle-income seniors will not have to mortgage their home when facing such costs.

The new law also offers every Medicare patient a free physical examination to identify problems early. The early diagnosis of many conditions is critical in restoring many patients to a healthy life at a much lower cost to Medicare.

### Frivolous Lawsuits Driving Doctors from Illinois

The American Medical Association placed Illinois on its National Warning List following the exodus of doctors from our state. Illinois obstetricians, neurosurgeons and emergency room physicians – most of whom have never been sued – are having to leave their patients due to the increasing threat of lawsuits and their rising insurance costs.

Both Wisconsin and Indiana protect their doctors from needless lawsuits. Many of our physicians are moving across the state line or quitting the practice of medicine because Illinois offers no protection.



Congressman Kirk and Congressman Greenwood (PA) held a press conference to discuss House legislation that protects our doctors from frivolous lawsuits.

**Congressman Kirk is working to enact federal protections for our doctors before specialists in key fields such as obstetrics leave the state entirely.** Many counties in Illinois already lack such specialists, leaving patients without nearby emergency room care.

### Concurrent Receipt Law Increases Benefits for Military Retirees

Last year's defense bill authorized "concurrent receipt" for many retired members of the military. Until passage of the bill, the law required that military retired pay be reduced by the amount of any VA disability compensation received.

**The new law authorizes concurrent receipt for retirees with at least a 50% disability rating, regardless of the cause of disability.** The amount retirees will be eligible for will be phased in over the next decade, ending in the elimination of retirement pay reductions.

The law also expands those receiving Combat Related Special Compensation by repealing a 60% minimum disability requirement. This compensation will now be paid to any military retiree with a purple heart.

## CARING FOR OUR VETERANS

### Kirk Announces New Joint Navy-VA Hospital

Congressman Kirk pioneered combining our northern Illinois veterans hospital with a new naval hospital planned for Great Lakes Naval Training Center. The first steps were taken in November when the North Chicago VA accepted active-duty patients and their dependents in its intensive care and mental health wards. **The Navy is now planning to build a \$170 million extension to the North Chicago VA, offering medical care for both veteran and active duty patients.**

"The integration of our Navy and VA hospitals will offer better care for active duty and veterans alike," said Kirk. "This will ensure veterans health care in northern Illinois."



Congressman Kirk talks with Waukegan veterans about the expansion of the North Chicago Veterans Administration Medical Center.

### Veterans Funding Increases in 2005 Budget

The House budget resolution supported by Congressman Kirk increased Veterans Administration funding by 15.3% for next year. At a time when the national number of veterans is declining, the VA is caring for more patients than ever – nearly five million last year. VA funding is at historic levels and will improve with the new VA-Navy hospital to be built in North Chicago.

### Tell Congressman Kirk What You Think on Key Issues

It is important for us to hear from you on key issues facing Congress. Please take a moment to answer the questions below and send them back to our office in Deerfield. We will report the results in our next newsletter.

To Mail Back: Please cut page along dotted line (left). Fold bottom edge up to arrow.

Fold top third down to meet bottom fold. Place tape at top opening to seal. Be sure mailing address is showing.

**1. With regard to our policy toward Iraq, the United States should:**

- ☐ Stay the course and finish the job.
- ☐ Reduce the U.S. commitment and limit our goals.
- ☐ Pull out of Iraq.
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. To cut the federal deficit, the Congress should:**

- ☐ Raise taxes for Americans making \$100,000 or more.
- ☐ Cut federal spending.
- ☐ Continue borrowing.
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. The House passed a \$275 billion transportation bill while the Senate passed a \$318 billion bill. With regard to the two versions of the bill:**

- ☐ The Congress should adopt the \$318 billion Senate bill with a five cent per gallon gas tax increase.
- ☐ The Congress should adopt the \$275 billion House bill without a gas tax increase.
- ☐ The President should veto the bill until the budget is balanced.

**4. Recently, Congress added a \$500 billion prescription drug benefit to help seniors pay for their medicine. Under the old law, Medicare gave no help to seniors for the cost of prescription drugs. With regard to this program, should the Congress:**

- ☐ Implement the law to have Medicare help with prescription drug prices.
- ☐ Add an additional \$500 billion benefit to help pay for more of the cost of medicine.
- ☐ Repeal the law because it is too expensive.

**5. Recently, President Bush proposed a Constitutional Amendment to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. With regard to this proposal, Congress should:**

- ☐ Pass the proposed amendment to the Constitution and send it to the states for ratification.
- ☐ Reject the amendment and let states define marriage (Illinois law requires marriage to be between only men and women).
- ☐ Legalize gay marriage.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



Write your return address here:

Place  
37¢  
Stamp  
Here



**Congressman Mark Kirk**  
102 Wilmot Road, Suite 200  
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OFFICIAL BUSINESS:

Congressional Survey Enclosed

## House Increases Terrorist Rewards Program

Following a January mission to the Afghan-Pakistan frontier, Congressman Kirk prepared legislation doubling the reward offered for the arrest of Osama Bin Laden to \$50 million. The bipartisan bill passed the House by a vote of 414 to 0.

The "Counter-Terrorist and Narco-Terrorist Rewards Program Act" also allows the payment of rewards for the capture of drug kingpins who provide funding for terrorism. The government of Spain recently reported the terrorist attacks in Madrid were funded through drug-related profits. Over the last year, key Al Qaeda leaders have become some of the largest dealers of heroin in Pakistan. The bill also allows the State Department to pay rewards in the form of farm equipment and seeds – sometimes considered more valuable than money in remote, rural villages.



*Congressman Kirk met in Afghanistan with President Hamid Karzai to talk about the war on terror.*

## HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

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[www.house.gov/kirk](http://www.house.gov/kirk)



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